

Ursinus, Oxford and the Westminster Divines

for

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R. Scott Clark, D.Phil.

Westminster Seminary in
California
Escondido, CA

rsclark@wtsca.edu

Joel Beeke, Ph.D.

Heritage Netherlands Reformed
Congregation
Grand Rapids, MI

jrbeeke@aol.com

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Introduction

"The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works; wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience" (WCF 7.2). That the Westminster Assembly of divines chose to express its doctrine of redemption by using the notion of the *foedus operum* troubles many contemporary theologians and historians of doctrine. Since the rise of Neo-orthodoxy many scholars have come to believe that the Westminster formulation erroneously diverges from Calvin's emphasis on God's undeserved sovereign grace.¹ The question has naturally arisen regarding the source of the alleged error. A number of scholars have regarded Calvin's successor in Geneva, Theodore Beza, to be the primary culprit — to quote my good friend Paul Schaefer at Northwestern College — the 'bad boy of the Reformation'.² Work by President Godfrey, Jill Raitt and Richard Muller has rescued Beza and now the critics have turned their guns on poor Zacharias Ursinus (1534-83).³

According to RT, Kendall, Ursinus was guilty of preparationism and assurance destroying legalism.⁴ Kendall theorizes that William Perkins drew his doctrine of faith in part from the Heidelberg theologians; consequently, it was through Perkins that Ursinus' theology

¹John Metcalfe, *The Westminster Confession Exploded: Deliverance From the Law* (Tylers Green, 1991); R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford, 1979); Holmes Rolston III, "Responsible Man in Reformed Theology: Calvin versus the Westminster Confession," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 23 (1970): 129-55; Basil Hall, "Calvin Against the Calvinists," *John Calvin: A Collection of Essays* (Grand Rapids, 1966).

²Heinrich Hepp, *Geschichte des deutschen Protestantismus in den Jahren 1555-1581*, 4 vol. (Marburg, 1852-59); Hans Emil Weber, *Reformation, Orthodoxie und Rationalismus* (Gütersloh, 1951); Otto Gründler, "Thomism and Calvinism in the Theology of Girolamo Zanchi" (Th.D. Thesis, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1961); Ernst Bizer, *Frihorthodoxie und Rationalismus* (Zurich, 1963); Walter Kickel, *Vernunft und Offenbarung bei Theodor Beza* (Neukirchen, 1967); Brian G. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy* (Madison, 1969); David C Steinmetz, *Reformers in the Wings* (Philadelphia, 1971), 169; John S. Bray, *Theodore Beza's Doctrine of Predestination* (Nieuwkoop, 1975); A. E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 2 vol. (Cambridge, 1986), 2.40; David. A. Weir, *The Origins of the Federal Theology in Sixteenth Century Reformation Thought* (Oxford, 1990), 65-87; Michael Jinkins, "Theodore Beza: Continuity and Regression in the Reformed Tradition," *Evangelical Quarterly* 64 (1992): 140-54.

³Kendall, 38-41, 197-208; R. W. A. Letham, "Saving Faith and Assurance in Reformed Theology: Zwingli to the Synod of Dort," 2 vol. (Ph.D. Thesis, Aberdeen, 1979), 1.187-95; Weir, vii, 101, 3; Stephen Strehle, *Calvinism, Federalism and Scholasticism: A Study of the Reformed Doctrine of the Covenant* (Bern, 1988), 165. The best biography of Ursinus in English is Derk Visser, *Zacharias Ursinus: The Reluctant Reformer, His Life and Times* (New York, 1983). See also, idem, "Zacharias Ursinus," *Shapers of Religious Traditions*, ed. Jill Raitt (New Haven, 1981), 121-39.

⁴ Kendall, 39, 41.

was communicated to the Westminster Assembly.⁵ R. W. A. Letham says that Ursinus thought of the covenant of works in a "reciprocal, mutual, contractual sense" such that "participation in the covenant was dependent upon embracing and serving Christ, so that the accent was on the responsibility of man rather than on the enabling grace of God,"⁶ Letham comes close to describing Ursinus's soteriology as synergistic. According to D. A. Weir, who also locates the source of the difficulty in Ursinus, "Zacharias Ursinus was the first theologian who first utilized the idea of a prelapsarian covenant to any great extent in the sixteenth century."⁷ The prelapsarian covenant was a "novel idea... associated with the Decalogue," the conditions of which were the same as the "postlapsarian covenant."⁸ Such federalism departed from Calvin's paradoxical theology.⁹ Upon this federalist theology the "Westminster Assembly put the stamp of orthodox approval."¹⁰ The strongest criticism of Ursinus, however, has come from Stephen Strehle who regards him as a purveyor of a sub-Protestant contract theology. For example, he says that Ursinus' theology of the sacraments was regression to the Franciscan pledge of divine favor to those who do their best.¹¹

This essay will argue that though these critics have misunderstood Ursinus, the Westminster Standards, and their inter-relationship, they are right to draw the connection. The nexus lies in what Warfield called "the architectonic principle of the Westminster Confession," namely, "the Federal theology."¹² We will argue (1) that Ursinus' Calvinism was a notable part of the stream of continental Reformed theology that flowed into England in the late sixteenth century and nourished young English Calvinists who would later take their places in the Assembly of the Divines, (2) that one medium by which Ursinus' theology was communicated to English Calvinism was Oxford University; and (3) that properly understood, his federalism, and by implication that of the Westminster divines, was Protestant, gracious, and Calvinist,

Ursinus, the Oxford Calvinists, and the Westminster Divines

Until recently the existence of a dynamic and influential group of theologians whom we shall call the Oxford Calvinists has been a secret well kept by historians. From the accession of

⁵ Kendall, 41, 56, 58, 62, 74, 210.

⁶ Letham, Letham, 1. 18795. See also Michael McGiffert, "From Moses to Adam: The Making of the Covenant of Works," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 19 (1988): 132-4, Weir, 101.

⁷ Weir, 101.

⁸ Weir, 105-6.

⁹ Weir, 156. For the opposite point of view see Peter A. Lillback, "Ursinus' Development of the Covenant of Creation: A Debt to Melancthon or Calvin?" *Westminster Theological Journal* 43 (1981): 247-288; Christopher J. Burchill, "On the Consolation of a Christian Scholar: Zacharias Ursinus (1534-1583) and the Reformation in Heidelberg," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 37 (1986): 565-583; Derk Visser, "The Covenant in Zacharias Ursinus," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 18 (1987): 531-544.

¹⁰ Weir, 157. For a general critique of the principles behind Weir's thesis see Lyle D. Bierma, "The Covenant Theology of Caspar Olevian" (Ph.D. Diss., Duke University, 1980); idem, "Federal Theology in the Sixteenth Century: Two Traditions?" *Westminster Theological Journal*, 45 (1983): 304-32 1; idem, "The Role of Covenant Theology in Early Reformed Orthodoxy," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 21 (1990): 453-462; Mark W. Karlberg, "Covenant Theology and the Westminster Tradition," *Westminster Theological Journal* 54 (1992): 135-152. For a view of Puritan federalism which views it as Protestant, see John von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought* (Atlanta, 1986). Donald K. McKim, "William Perkins and the theology of the Covenant," *Studies of the Church in History*, ed. Horton Davies (Allison Park, 1983), sees Perkins' federalism as Protestant. For an interpretation of the Puritans which strongly dissents from Kendall see Paul Helm, *Calvin and the Calvinists* (Edinburgh, 1982); idem, "Calvin and the Covenant: Unity and Continuity," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 55 (1983): 65-82; Joel Beeke, *Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism and the Dutch Second Reformation* (New York, 1991); idem, "Faith and Assurance in the Heidelberg Catechism and its Primary Composers: A Fresh Look at the Kendall Thesis," *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 (1992): 39-67; idem, "Does Assurance Belong to the Essence of Faith? Calvin and the Calvinists," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 5 (1994): 4371; Paul R. Schaefer, "The Spiritual Brotherhood on the Habits of the Heart: Cambridge Protestants and the Doctrine of Sanctification from William Perkins to Thomas Shepard" (D.Phil., Thesis, Oxford University, 1994).

¹¹ Strehle, 165.

¹² Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work* (New York, 1931), 56.

Elizabeth (1558) until the appointment of William Laud as her Chancellor (1630), Oxford University was dominated by Calvinist theologians.¹³ This period of influence was even longer if one considers that the great Italian Reformed theologian Peter Martyr Vermigli (1491-1562) was Regius Professor of Divinity under Edward VI (1548-53).¹⁴ C. M. Dent and Nicholas Tyacke have recently documented the rise and predominance of Calvinism in Oxford.¹⁵ Under Martyr's influence, Reformed theology gained a foothold in Oxford. Though its prospects diminished considerably under Mary Tudor, the planted seed was watered with the blood of the Marian martyrs. Upon Elizabeth's accession the Reformed contingent, which had flourished under Edward, was slow to return; consequently there was a shortage of Protestant preachers. "There were only three Protestant preachers in the University of Oxford in the year 1563, and they were all Puritans, viz., Dr. Humphrys, Mr. Kingsmill, and Mr. Sampson."¹⁶ Not until the visitation of 1568 did Calvinism begin to flourish again in Oxford.¹⁷ By the mid 1570's students from Zurich, Geneva and Heidelberg were venturing back to Oxford, bringing their Reformed theology with them.¹⁸

The leading Oxford Calvinist of the late sixteenth century was John Reynolds (1549-1607) who was President of Corpus Christi College and Dean of Lincoln.¹⁹ The Presbyterian activist John Field (1545-88) proceeded M. A. in 1567.²⁰ Patrick Collinson has traced forty-two Puritan ministers in Oxford in the decade 1565-75.²¹ Other outstanding Oxford Calvinists were, Laurence Humphrey (c.1527-90), Edmund Bunney (1539-c.1618), William Twisse (c.1578-1646), Daniel Featley (1582-1645),²² and Cornelius Burgess (c.1589-1665).²³ The latter three sat in the Assembly.

¹³Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (London, 1967), 129.

¹⁴On early English Protestantism see Carl R. Trueman, *Luther's Legacy. Salvation and the English Reformers 1525-1566* (Oxford, 1994). On Vermigli see John Patrick Donnelly, *Calvinism and Scholasticism in Vermigli's Doctrine of Man and Grace* (Leiden, 1976); Frank A. James III, "A Late Medieval Parallel in Reformation Thought: *Gemina Praedestinatio* in Gregory of Rimini and Peter Martyr Vermigli," *Via Augustini: Augustine in the Later Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation*, ed. Heiko A. Oberman, Frank A. James (Leiden, 1991).

¹⁵C. M. Dent, *Protestant Reformers in Elizabethan Oxford* (Oxford, 1983); Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists. The Rise of English Arminianism* (Oxford, 1987), 4-16.

¹⁶Daniel Neal, *History of the Puritans*, 5 vol. (London, 1822), 1.145. On some of the difficulties attending to the use of the word "Puritan" see Dent, 2-3.

¹⁷Dent, 44ff. Henry VIII, Edward VI and Elizabeth I sent ecclesiastical "visitors" to ensure that the colleges and University were conforming to the Protestant regime. Often royal visitors were rewarded with permanent posts in prominent colleges.

¹⁸Dent, 74-102.

¹⁹Sidney Lee, ed. *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 16 (London, 1909). Hereafter *DNB*.

²⁰Collinson, 85-6. Field was the co-author of the *Admonition to Parliament* (1572) for which part he served a year in prison. Collinson, 153, speculates that after imprisonment, Field fled to Heidelberg in 1573. This hypothesis explains his close connections to the Continental Reformed movement and how he became the translator of Caspar Olevian's *An Exposition of the Symbole of the Apostles or Rather the Articles of Faith*, (London, 1581) and J. Piscator's *Aphorismes of the Christian Religion* (London, 1596). Dan G. Danner, s.v. "Field, John," *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Edinburgh, 1992). On the Presbyterian "radicals" at Oxford, see Dent, 131-45; Mark H. Curtis, *Oxford and Cambridge in Transition 1558-1640* (Oxford, 1959), 199-203; Roland G. Ussher, *The Presbyterian Movement in the Reign of Elizabeth* (London, 1905).

²¹Collinson, 129. Collinson does not indicate how many of these ministers were attending Oxford.

²²It is true that Featley did not sit the entire session. However, A. F. Mitchell, ed. *Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly* (Edinburgh, 1874), xxxii, lxvi, says that he played a significant role in the abortive revision of the Thirty-Nine Articles, even defending against Twisse, the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's active obedience. See also, Charles Davis Cremeans, *The Reception of Calvinistic Thought in England* (Urbana, 1949), 84-5.

²³To be sure, present in the Oxford contingent, if we include Thomas Goodwin (1600-80), who was later President of Magdalen College, were the additional independents, Philip Nye and Joseph Caryl (James Reid, *Memoirs of the Westminster Divines* 2 vol. (London, 1811 [reprinted, Edinburgh, 1982]), 1.37-98; Warfield, 37).

Incepting Doctors routinely defended stoutly Calvinist theses from the 1590's until the 1630's and Oxford preaching was largely Calvinist in the 1590's.²⁴ Not only preachers, however, were attracted to Calvinism. The official structures of the University were largely controlled by Calvinists. As the semi-Pelagian backlash developed, it was quite likely that the offending Oxonian preacher could find himself explaining his views to a rigorously Calvinist vice-chancellor.²⁵ Whereas in Cambridge, explicit Calvinism was banned from Commencement by Royal proclamation in 1626, such was not the case in Oxford until 1632.²⁶ From 1613 Abbot lectured regularly in Oxford against the Dutch Arminians. For most of the period from 1548-1654 the Regius Professorship of Divinity was held by Calvinists.²⁷ In addition, many Oxford Calvinists served as heads of colleges and in other positions of authority.²⁸

Oxford was only part of the larger trend toward the dominance of Calvinism in Elizabethan England.²⁹ The Calvinist Edmund Grindal (c.1519-83) was Archbishop of Canterbury for thirteen years (1570-83) and the Oxonian Calvinist George Abbot (1562-1633) was Archbishop of Canterbury for twenty-two years (1611-33). Mark Curtis notes that the leading Puritan spokesmen at the Hampton Court Conference (1604) were Oxonians.³⁰ Undoubtedly the major impetus for Calvinism in England was the Geneva Bible. Between 1579-1615 thirty-nine quarto editions were printed bound with a Calvinist catechism.³¹ Calvin's *Institutes* were first translated in 1561 by Thomas Norton; more of Calvin was published in England than of any other Protestant writer from 1548-1600.³²

Of the approximately 108 delegates who actively worked to shape the Westminster Confession, about one third received their theological training at Oxford.³³ Both the Prolocutors of the Assembly, Twisse and Charles Herle (1598-1659) were Oxford men.³⁴ Many of the Assembly's Oxonians began their academic careers in colleges such as All-Souls or Queens but eventually were "translated" (to borrow Thomas Reid's term) to what was then Magdalen Hall

²⁴Dent, 222. To 'incept' is to commence one's degree by defending theses.

²⁵Tyacke, 58-76. See also Curtis, 177.

²⁶Tyacke, 76. On Calvinism at Cambridge, see Schaefer, 10-21.

²⁷Peter Martyr, 1548-54; Laurence Humphrey, 1560-1589; Thomas Holland, 1589-1612 (Anthony á Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses* [London, 1815], 2.111, does not say if Holland was a Calvinist); Richard Abbot, 1612-15; John Prideaux, 1615-41; Joshua Hoyle, 1648-54. See *The Historical Register of the University of Oxford* (Oxford, 1900), 48; *DNB*, vol. 10; Joseph Foster, ed. *Alumni Oxonienses* (London, 1892), vol. 2.

²⁸Francis Cheynell, a member of the Assembly, was Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity from 1648-52. John Wallis, Clerk of the Assembly, was Savilian Professor of Geometry, 1649-1704. Edward Corbet was University Orator in 1648 (*The Historical Register*, 39, 52-3).

²⁹Tyacke, 3.

³⁰Curtis, 197.

³¹Tyacke, 2.

³²Creameans, 65-6.

³³The actual number of participants is hard to reckon since many who were called to serve did not attend the Assembly. Here is a partial list of the Oxford Calvinists who sat in the Assembly: William Twisse, Cornelius Burgess, John White, Thomas Baylie, Richard Byfield, Joseph Caryl, Thomas Case, Humphrey Chambers, Francis Cheynell, Thomas Coleman, John Conant, Edward Corbet, Calibute Downing, John Drury, Thomas Ford, John Foxcroft, Hannibal Gammon, William Greenhill, Robert Harris, Charles Herle, Richard Heyrick, Gaspar Hicckes, Joshua Hoyle, John Ley, John Maynard, Philip Nye, William Rathband, Edward Reynolds, Obadiah Sedgwick, Edmund Stanton, John Strickland, Thomas Temple, Christopher Tesdale, John Wallis, Henry Wilkinson, Francis Woodcock.

³⁴Reid, 1.37, 2.25, 208.

(now Hertford College), so that Oxford had its own Puritan enclave.³⁵ According to Tyacke, the Calvinist atmosphere at Oxford might have been even more rigorous than at Cambridge. Unlike Cambridge, there was no dispute at Oxford in the 1590's between "Arminians" (speaking anachronistically) and Calvinists. "Arminianism" had "been checked" in the 1580's.³⁶

Ursinus played a significant role in mediating Calvinism to Oxford. His connection with English Calvinism and with the Westminster Confession lies first of all in the Heidelberg Catechism itself and secondarily in his lectures on the Heidelberg Catechism. Two months after it was first published in German, in 1563, the Heidelberg Catechism was translated into Latin by Joshua Lagus and Lambertus Pithopoeus.³⁷ This was the version defended by Ursinus and Olevianus in the University of Heidelberg and in the seminary (*Collegium Sapientiae*), as well as the version which first reached international Calvinism. The first English translation, *The catechisme, or maner to teach children and others the Christian fayth: used in all the landes and dominions that are vnder the mighty prince Frederike, the palsgraue of the Rhene* was completed by the non-conformist William Turner (1510-1568) in 1568 and published in 1572.³⁸ The Catechism was widely used in England and, in January 1579, Oxford University required that it "should be used for the extirpation of every heresy and the preparation of the youth in true piety."³⁹ It was the only catechism printed by the University. It was re-translated by John Seddon and published twice in 1588 with the arms of the University on the title page.⁴⁰ English Puritanism found the Heidelberg Catechism congenial; in fact, it was still being published in 1804, by Oxford University Press.⁴¹ Cambridge too was feeling the impact of the Catechism. In recounting his spiritual experience at age fourteen while a scholar in Christ's Cambridge, Thomas Goodwin (1600-80) described in passing the use of the Catechism among Puritans:

I received the sacrament at Easter when I was fourteen years old, and for that prepared myself as I was able. I set myself to examine whether I had grace or not, and by all the signs in Ursin's Catechism, which was in use among the Puritans in the College, I found them all, as I thought in me.⁴²

The other major source of Ursinus' influence on the development of English Calvinism were his lectures on the Catechism. They were first edited by his student David Pareus and published by

³⁵Hertford College absorbed Magdalen Hall in the mid-nineteenth century. Magdalen Hall was a medieval hall among whose alumni was William Tyndale. John Owen graduated B.A. from Queens College in 1628 and proceeded MA in 1635. He was later Dean of Christ Church and Vice-Chancellor of the University.

³⁶Tyacke, 58-9.

³⁷Fred H. Klooster, "The Heidelberg Catechism. Origin and History" (Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, 1989), 187.

³⁸London, 1572. J. I. Good, *The Heidelberg Catechism in Its Newest Light* (Philadelphia, 1914), 22-5. Turner was a physician, botanist, Dean of Wells, a friend of Nicholas Ridley, and attended the "religious conference" at the White Horse Inn. He was exiled under Mary and returned upon Elizabeth's accession (*DNB*, vol. 19).

³⁹Good, 26; Dent, 88. Dent, 92-3, rather inaccurately characterizes the Heidelberg Catechism as "anthropocentric" in contrast to Bullinger's "theocentric" *Catechesis pro adulatoribus scripta* (Zurich, 1559). Warfield, 379-400, made the same sort of dichotomy between the Heidelberg Catechism and the Westminster Shorter Catechism. In the first place, this sort of analysis is unhistorical and misleading. Bullinger wrote for a community which had benefited from three decades of Reformed teaching. The Westminster Shorter Catechism was written for a nation which had enjoyed a century of Reformed influence. In contrast, the Heidelberg Catechism was written to a largely Lutheran audience with virtually *no prior* Reformed instruction. Secondly, as Fred Klooster has ably shown, even the Heidelberg Catechism's first question, which appears at first glance to be anthropocentric, is actually answered within a theocentric, Trinitarian framework. Finally, additional questions and answers of the Heidelberg Catechism clearly posit theocentric principles, e.g., Questions 6, 50, 52, 53, 58, 86, 122, 123, 128.

⁴⁰Dent, 91. *A catechisme, or short kind of instruction, whereby to teach children and the ignoraunter sort, the Christian religion*. trans. J. Seddon (Oxford, 1588).

⁴¹*Sylloge confessionum sub tempus reformandæ Ecclesiæ editarum. Subjiciuntur Catechismus Heidelbergensis et canones Synodi Dordrechtanæ*, ed. J. Randolph (Oxford, 1804).

⁴²*The Works of Thomas Goodwin* (Edinburgh, 1861), 2.lii.

Simon Goulart in Geneva in 1584.⁴³ The *Compendium Christinae Doctrinae* was translated into English in 1587 by Henry Parry, a young Calvinist Oxford undergraduate, later Greek reader at Corpus Christi College, Bishop of Worcester and Gloucester, and Chaplain to the Queen.⁴⁴ Parry's translation went through seven editions in Oxford from 1587 to 1633.⁴⁵ The *Compendium* was not only reprinted seven times in Oxford, but also enjoyed almost constant use in the University Library in the last two decades of the sixteenth century. Presently, various editions of the Ursinus' *Compendium* and collected works are held widely in Oxford's colleges. It is likely that most of these volumes were acquired in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.⁴⁶ Quirinus Reuter, published Ursinus' collected works in 1612, in which the lectures on the Catechism were expanded and retitled *Explicationes Catecheseos*.⁴⁷ Later editions of Pareus' edition of Ursinus' lectures on the Catechism were published in Heidelberg (1621), Frankfurt (1627) and Hanau (1634) with miscellaneous catechetical works as *Corpus Doctrinae Ecclesiarum* and were added to the Bodleian Library.⁴⁸

Besides the *Compendium*, several of Ursinus' smaller works were quickly translated into English, which indicates that there was a demand for Ursinus in Oxford in this period. John Stockwood, "a schoole teacher," translated Ursinus' exposition of the Fourth Commandment from his *Loci Theologici* as *A Verie Profitable and Necessary Discourse Concerning the Observation and Keeping of the Sabbath Day*.⁴⁹ Several other shorter works were published in Oxford in 1600 as *A Collection of Certain Learned Discourses*.⁵⁰ According to Dent, Ursinus' lectures were, in this period, "a standard textbook" in Oxford.⁵¹ He was certainly perceived as a threat by the Archbishop of York who, in 1630, banned the sale of his books along with those of William Perkins.⁵² Thus, by the time the Westminster Assembly was convened, Ursinus'

⁴³*Doctrinae christianae compendium, seu commentarii catechetici* (Geneva, 1584).

⁴⁴*The Summe of Christian Doctrine*, trans. Henry Parrie (Oxford, 1587). On Henry Parry see Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses* 2.102-3. Wood incorrectly attributed to Parry the 1591 translation of "a catechism...by Zacharias Ursinus." The entry under "Parry, Henry" in *DNB*, vol. 15 (London, 1921-2) repeats this error.

⁴⁵See John Platt, *Reformed Thought and Protestant Scholasticism* (Leiden, 1982), 49-56.

⁴⁶Paul Morgan, "Inter-Collegiate Catalogue of Pre-1640 Foreign Books in Oxford Libraries Outside the Bodleian" (1985, Unpublished Typescript in the Lower Reading Room of the Bodleian Library, Oxford); A. W. Pollard and R. R. Redgrave, *A Short Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, & Ireland and English Books Printed Abroad 1475-1640*, 2 vol., 2nd ed. (London, 1976); Paul Morgan et al., "Holdings of STC Books in Oxford Libraries other than the Bodleian" (1985, Unpublished Typescript in the Lower Reading Room of the Bodleian Library, Oxford).

⁴⁷Zacharias Ursinus, *Opera theologica*, 3 vol., ed. Quirinus Reuter (Heidelberg, 1612). An earlier collection of Ursinus' shorter writings had already been published by Ursinus' son from 1584-9 (Zacharias Ursinus, *Volumen tractationem*, 2 vol., ed. Joanes Ursinus [Neustadt, 1584-9]).

⁴⁸Zacharias Ursinus, *Corpus doctrinae Christianae Ecclesiarum à papatu reformatarum, continens explicationes catecheticas d. Zachariae Ursini, denuò recogn. studio D. Parei. Accesserunt Miscellanea catechetica diligenter recognita* (Heidelberg, 1621). Bodleian Library, *The first printed catalogue of the Bodleian Library 1605, a facsimile: Catalogus librorum bibliothecae publicae quam ... Thomas Bodleius eques auratus in academia Oxoniensi nuper instituit* (Oxford, 1986).

⁴⁹London, 1584. Zacharias Ursinus, *Loci theologici traditi in academia Heidelbergensi, expositio decalogi, quartum praeceptum. Tractationem*, vol. 1. This treatise can also be found in *Opera* 1.713-25.

⁵⁰Zacharias Ursinus, *A collection of certaine learned discourses, written by Zachary Vrsine. For explication of divers difficult points, laide downe in his Catechisme*, trans. I. H. (Oxford, 1600). The shorter writings of Ursinus included were, *An Exhortation to Study Christianity (In paranesi ad sacrae theologiae studium [Opera, 1.3-9])*; *The Antiochian Beliefe Touching the Incarnation of the Word... (De verbi incarnatione. symbolum patrum antiochinorum adversus Paulus Samosatenum [Opera, following vol. 3 under Miscellanea catechetica seu collectio D. Paraei D. 27-8])*; *An Epistle of Ursin upon Predestination (Epistola D. Zachariae Ursini ad amicum, de praedestinatione [Misc. Cat. 28-44])*; *A Brief Exposition of the controversie about the Lordes supper: between the Consubstantialists, and the maintainers of the truth (Compendiosa explicatio totius de coena domini controversiae inter synuistas et orthodoxos [Misc. Cat. 47-53])*; *Rules and Axiomes of certain chiefe pointes of Christianitie...(Theses theologicae de parcipuis aliquot doctrinae Christianae [Misc. Cat. 53-83])*.

⁵¹Dent, 186.

⁵²Tyacke, 182.

commentary and *Opera* were a fixture in the English Reformed theological landscape, particularly in Oxford.

Through the Catechism and the *Compendium* there is a definite link between Ursinus and Oxford, and through the latter to the Assembly. It is difficult, however, to document more this link precisely. For example, though Thomas Goodwin mentioned "Ursin's catechism" (the Heidelberg Catechism), I was unable to find any explicit references to Ursinus in several of Goodwin's major works, e.g., *Christ Set Forth* - not even when he discusses the covenant, where one might expect at least a passing reference to Ursinus.⁵³ This omission can be explained in part by the fact that writers of this period did not usually cite sources extensively. It is striking, however, that when Goodwin does refer to other sixteenth century continental theologians such as Wollebius, Keckermann, Piscator, Polanus and Calvin, he omitted Ursinus. Christ's role as Mediator was a prominent theme in Ursinus, but he was not mentioned in Goodwin's, *A Discourse of Christ the Mediator*.⁵⁴ Cornelius Burgess, in his *Baptismal Regeneration of Infants*, appealed to Calvin, Peter Martyr, Zanchi, Junius, Bucer and Beza as authorities who supported his position, but not to Ursinus.⁵⁵ Nor did Daniel Featley, in *Pelagius Redivivus*,⁵⁶ or William Twisse, in *The Riches of God's Love*, appeal to Ursinus, despite the fact that Ursinus wrote explicitly on predestination.⁵⁷ In his lecture on the question of the Sabbath, at the Act of 1622, John Prideaux did cite Ursinus (along with Calvin, Bullinger, Bucer, and several other continental theologians) in support of his position.⁵⁸ Yet he did not cite Ursinus either in his lectures *de iustificatione* or *de Christi satisfactione*.⁵⁹ Nor did George Abbot cite Ursinus in his *Quaestiones Sex*, a collection of lectures delivered in the Divinity schools in 1597.⁶⁰ A second partial explanation for Ursinus' absence in these authors is that, in a sense, the major theological controversies had passed him. The Remonstrant controversy and resurgent Catholicism were the issues of the day.⁶¹

Ursinus and Reformed Federalism

It is the contention of this essay that the attempt by Kendall, Letham, Weir and Strehle to characterize Ursinus' and Westminster's federalism as sub-Protestant will not stand close scrutiny of the sources. For example, though Kendall acknowledges that Ursinus defined faith as a "certain knowledge" and "an assured trust," he also asserts that Ursinus made the practical

⁵³Thomas Goodwin, *Christ Set Forth in his Death, Resurrection, Ascension, Sitting at God's Right Hand, Intercession as the Cause of Justification, Object of Justifying Faith* (London, 1642), 52-66.

⁵⁴London, 1692 (reprinted, Edinburgh, 1863).

⁵⁵Oxford, 1629.

⁵⁶London, 1626.

⁵⁷Oxford, 1653.

⁵⁸John Prideaux, "Oratio VII inauguralis in promotione doctorum Christ," in *Viginti-duae Lectiones de totidem Religionis capitibus praecipue hic tempore controversis, prout publice habebantur oxoniae in vesperis* (Oxford, 1643), 1.67; *The Doctrine of the Sabbath* (London, 1634), 34.

⁵⁹*Viginti-duae Lectiones*, 1.60-76; 1.294-308.

⁶⁰George Abbot, *Quaestiones Sex, totidem praelectionibus, in schola theologica, oxoniae, pro forma, habitis, discussae, et discetptae. Anno 1597* (Oxford, 1598). Abbot cited the following sixteenth century Protestants: Calvin, 91; John Whitgift, 98; Thomas Cartwright, 99; Bucer, 107, 108; Melancthon, 113, 116, 125; Chemnitz, 151; Peter Martyr, 162, 165, 167, 177, 200; Whittaker, 200. He wrote against Edmund Campion and cited mainly patristic authors, usually Augustine.

⁶¹These writers followed the trend observed by Dent, 93-102. However Dent mistakes the move of Reformed theology from the pulpit to the classroom for a decline. See Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* 2 vol. (Grand Rapids, 1987-). For the point of view that Ursinus' scholastic method did adversely affect his theology, see John Platt, *Reformed Thought and Protestant Scholasticism* (Leiden, 1982), 49-59; Patrick J. Donnelly, "Immortality and Method in Ursinus's Theological Ambiance," *Controversy and Conciliation: The Palatinate Reformation, 1559-1618*, ed. Derk Visser (Pittsburgh, 1986).

syllogism the ground of faith.⁶² This is not a tenable reading of Ursinus. The definition of faith in Ursinus' commentary parallels his definition given in Question 38 of the *Summa*, "*What is faith?*"

It is to assent strongly to everything delivered to us in the word of God and to have a firm trust by which each one stands, that remission of sins, righteousness and life eternal, are gracious gifts from God to us, for the sake of Christ's merit and through him. This faith having been kindled in the hearts of the elect by the Holy Spirit, makes us living members of Christ and produces in us true love for and calling upon God.⁶³

Later in the *Summa* he augmented this definition by placing it within the framework of Calvin's Prophet-Priest-King scheme. "*What is it therefore to believe in Jesus Christ?*"

It is to have this comfort, that just as by our King himself, we are given and ruled by the Holy Spirit, and defended against all dangers; even so by our High Priest, we are reconciled and led to the Father, so that from him we might be able to seek and expect all good things; so likewise by the prophets we are illumined with the true knowledge of the Father. Finally, that we and all ours might be made kings and priests with him for ever, with him ruling over all creatures and making thankful offerings to God, and be made prophets truly knowing and worshipping God.⁶⁴

In Question 66 Ursinus again turned to the mystical witness of the Spirit. "*What is it to believe in the Son of God?* It is to feel in the heart, by the testimony of the Holy Spirit, that we are adopted by God as sons, for the sake of his only begotten Son."⁶⁵ Ursinus made frequent use of both the *syllogismus practicus* and the *syllogismus mysticus*. One's election is known by one's faith, and progress in piety, which is buttressed by good works.⁶⁶ These syllogistic aids, however, were not intended to function outside a gracious, Trinitarian, Christ-centered structure of salvation.⁶⁷ To believe in Christ as *Lord* is to have confidence that one will never be snatched from his hand.⁶⁸ It is difficult to see what in this definition of faith would tend toward an undue emphasis on the will, preparationism or the like. It would appear that Kendall has also caricatured Ursinus, just as his analysis of Calvin and English Protestantism has been criticized as a caricature. In contrast to Kendall, one should remember that for Ursinus faith is first of all a sovereign gift of grace, not the act of an unregenerate human will. As in the Heidelberg, so also in the *Summa*, faith is informed by the Word, and it is personal -- "kindled in the hearts of the

⁶²Kendall, 40-1.

⁶³Question 38: *Quid est fides?* Est firmiter assentiri omni verbo Dei nobis tradito: & firma fiducia qua singuli statuunt, sibi donatam esse a Deo remissionem peccatorum, iustitiam & vitam aeternam, gratis, propter meritum Christi & per eum: accensa in electorum cordibus a Spiritu sancto: faciens nos viva Christi membra & gignens in nobis veram dilectionem & invocationem Dei (*Summa, Opera*, 1, 14). All English translations in this essay are the authors' unless otherwise indicated. The authors gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Ray Lanning, Charles Krahe and Steven M. Baugh with translations incorporated into this essay.

⁶⁴Question 64: *Quid est igitur in Iesum Christum credere?* Est consolationem hanc habere, quod ab ipso tanquam rege nostro donemur & regamur Spiritu sancto, & defendamur adversus omnia pericula tanquam a summo sacerdote nostro, reconcilemur & adducamur Patri, ut ab eo petere & expectare omnia bona possimus: tanquam a Propheta, vera Patris agnitione illuminemur: Efficiamur denique cum ipso reges, in aeternum cum ipso dominantes omnibus creaturis: & sacerdotes, nos & nostra omnia, gratas iam hostias Deo offerentes: & Prophetas DEUM vere agnoscentes & celebrantes (*Summa, Opera*, 1, 16).

⁶⁵Question 66: *Quid est in Filium Dei credere?* Est in corde, Spiritus sancti testimonio, sentire, nos a Deo propter Filium eius unigenitum in filios adoptatos esse (*Opera*, 1, 16).

⁶⁶See *Opera* 1.21, 3.44; Beeke, "Faith and Assurance," 56-7.

⁶⁷Beeke, "Faith and Assurance," 59-60. Ursinus rejected in the strongest terms the Roman Catholic doctrine that assurance of election is not possible (Otto Thelemann, *An Aid to the Heidelberg Catechism* [Grand Rapids, 1959], 452-3).

⁶⁸*Summa, Opera*, 1, 16

elect" (*accensa in electorum cordibus*); its object is Christ and his *meritum* and benefits graciously given. At the same time the regenerate person does strongly assent. This balance is very similar to Calvin's definition of faith in *Institutes* 3.2.7.

Conditionality in the *Compendium* and the *Summa Theologiae*

The approach represented by Kendall, Letham, Weir, and Strehle, has also unnecessarily muddied the water by consistently failing to distinguish between *covenant conditionality* by which human beings are accepted by God only after they have met certain conditions and *covenant obligations* which God places on his redeemed people.⁶⁹ Were Ursinus' federal theology to require human cooperation with divine grace for acceptance with God, then it could be fairly described as a regression to the semi-Pelagian-Nominalist *pactum* theology of Gabriel Biel (c.1415-95).⁷⁰ This was demonstrably not the case in Ursinus. This criticism confuses obligations imposed upon the elect *after* redemption with conditions required *before* redemption.⁷¹ The critics have taken hold of the definition of *foedus* which Ursinus gave in his lectures on the catechism:

What is this covenant?

A covenant in general is a mutual contract, or agreement between two parties, in which the one party binds itself to the other to accomplish something upon certain conditions, giving or receiving something, which is accompanied with certain outward signs and symbols, for the purpose of ratifying in the most solemn manner the contract entered into, and for the sake of confirming it, that the engagement may be kept inviolate.⁷²

In order to properly understand Ursinus' definition of the covenant it is important to note the distinction which Ursinus himself implied in his answer. This answer defines a covenant *in genere* which concept is controlled by his understanding of the covenant of works. We will see that when Ursinus describes the covenant of works, however, he has in view the federal representatives who as public persons possessed unique abilities. He saw Christ accomplishing for elect humanity what Adam had failed to accomplish for all humanity: perfect obedience to God's law over a probationary period.⁷³ He distinguished clearly between the covenant as it considers the federal heads and the covenant as it respects sinners. The criticisms of Ursinus which we have noted fail to observe this crucial distinction between *genus* and *species*; between *substantia* et *accidens*.

Ursinus' notion of the covenant of grace cannot be separated from his Calvinist soteriology. He defined covenant as a *mutua pactio* because when he thought of covenant, he thought first of all of the covenant as it was conceived in the natural prelapsarian state, in which Adam had the ability not to sin. The prelapsarian covenant controlled his definition of covenant.

⁶⁹On Calvin and conditionality see Peter A. Lillback, "The Continuing Conundrum: Calvin and the Conditionality of the Covenant," *Calvin Theological Journal* 29 (1994): 42-74.

⁷⁰See Gabriel Biel, *Quaestiones de justificatione*, ed. Carol Feckes (Münster, 1929); John L. Farthing, *Thomas Aquinas and Gabriel Biel: Interpretations of St. Thomas Aquinas in German Nominalism on the Eve of the Reformation* (Durham NC, 1988).

⁷¹Derk Visser, "The Covenant," 532.

⁷²Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. George Willard (Columbus, 1852), 97. *Quod sit foedus Dei?* Foedus in genere est mutua pactio duarum partium, qua altera alteri se certis conditionibus obligat ad aliquid faciendum, dandum vel accipiendum, adhibitis signis et symbolis externis ad solennem testificationem, confirmationis causa, ut promissio sit inviolabilis (Zacharias Ursinus, *Explicationes Catecheseos Palatinae, sive corpus Theologiae in Opera*, 1, 99).

⁷³Geerhardus Vos, "The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology," *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin (Phillipsburg, 1980), 242-5, reminds us that it is this attribute which distinguished the Reformed conception of creation and covenant from the Lutheran conception.

This is why when defining the law, Ursinus returns to the prelapsarian covenant between God and Adam. "*What does the divine law teach?*"

The sort of covenant which God began with man, in creation; by which man should have carried himself in serving God; and what God would require from him after beginning with him a new covenant of grace; that is, how and for what [end] man was created by God; and to what state he might be restored; and by which covenant one who has been reconciled to God ought to arrange his life.⁷⁴

Ursinus conceived of sin and redemption in terms of a broken covenant of works and a gracious covenant of redemption. The Sinaitic law was not read back into creation. Rather, the Sinaitic law is a reflection of God's prelapsarian intention. Thus the law was said to apply in the New Covenant, not however as a condition of righteousness, but as a guide to life for the redeemed. This *tertius usus legis* is standard Protestant stuff to be found in Luther's Larger Catechism, in the later editions of Melancthon's *Loci Communes* (1533 et seq.) and in Chemnitz commentary on the same. Consequently, he defined original sin in terms of willful unbelief of God's probationary promise of blessing.⁷⁵ For Ursinus, sin is a contradiction of our created status as obedient bearers of the divine image (the *qualis* of creation) and it is the status to which we have been graciously returned in Christ. For Ursinus "*conditus*" and "*redactus*," and "*reconciliatus*" are parallel terms.⁷⁶ God sovereignly, graciously creates, redeems and renews without our assistance. This question which has been taken as a stark indicator of Ursinus' legalism is actually a powerful example of the radical graciousness and divine monergism of his federalism.

A quick series of subsequent questions on the *imago Dei* confirm that Ursinus is thoroughly Protestant and Reformed. "*How was man created?*" We were made in God's image.⁷⁷ What was this image? "The true knowledge of God and of the divine will, and the inclination and desire of the whole man to live solely according to this image."⁷⁸ What was the goal of the prelapsarian covenant? That man "might worship God his entire life, in eternal blessedness."⁷⁹ The doctrine that one is created *ad imaginem Dei* is organically related to the eschatological orientation of the prelapsarian covenant. In Ursinus' theology, to be God's image means to be fit *ad aeternitatem*. For Ursinus, there was looming before Adam, in the prelapsarian *foedus*, a state of final blessedness and communion with God, conditioned upon his obedience to the probationary command or the *lex naturale*. The corollary of this promised eternal beatitude is the promised eternal suffering upon transgression of the terms of the covenant.⁸⁰

In this light one may understand the rest of his definition of the covenant. What he meant by *mutua pactio* is a *foedus* in which "God gives assurance to men that he will be merciful to them, forgive their sins, grant unto them a new righteousness, the Holy Spirit, and eternal life

⁷⁴*Quid docet lex divina?* Quale in creatione foedus cum homine Deus iniverit; quo pacto se homo in eo servando gesserit: & quid ab ipso Deus post initium cum eo novum foedus gratiae, requirat: hoc est, qualis & ad quid conditus sit homo a Deo, in quem statum sit redactus: et quo pacto vitam suam Deo reconciliatus debat institutere (*Summa*, Question 10, *Opera*, 1, 10).

⁷⁵Question 25: *Quid est peccatum originis?* Est reatus propter lapsum primorium parentum & ignorantiae & dubitatio de Deo & eius voluntate, & inclinatio ad ea quae Deus prohibuit, propter lapsum primorum parentum omnib. innascens, & causa omnium malarum actionum internarum & externarum (*Opera*, 1, 11).

⁷⁶They are both carefully expressed in the passive voice.

⁷⁷Question 11: *Qualis est homo conditus?* Ad imaginem Dei (*Opera*, 1, 10).

⁷⁸Question 12: *Quae haec est imago?* Vera Dei & divinae voluntatis agnitio & secundum hanc solam vivendi, totius hominis inclinatio & studium (*Opera*, 1.10).

⁷⁹Question, 13: *Ad quid autem est conditus?* Ut universa vita sua Deum in aeterna beatitudine colat (*Opera*, 1, 10).

⁸⁰"However, every sin is infinitely culpable, because the offense was against God, that is, against infinite good; therefore it merits infinite punishment." (Question 30, Est autem omne peccatum culpa infinita; quia Dei, id est boni infiniti offensio est itaque poenam infinitam meretur [*Summa*, *Opera*, 1, 11]).

by and for the sake of his Son, our Mediator."⁸¹ It is the office of the Mediator, not of sinners, to restore the Covenant broken in the fall and to redeem the lost.⁸² The covenant of grace is not possible without the Mediator to satisfy God's justice in place of the elect.⁸³ It should be carefully noted that, for Ursinus, it is God who initiated the *foedus* (*Deus confirmat*) and God who graciously granted its benefits, all of which are granted "for the sake of the Son" (*propter filium*). It would appear that Ursinus' critics have ignored the *propter filium* or *propter Christum* of Ursinus' covenant theology.⁸⁴

The blessings of the covenant are secured for the elect by the "merit and efficacy" of Jesus, the "author of perfect and eternal salvation for all who believe in him."⁸⁵ God's function in *foedere* is primary and our part is secondary. Our part of the covenant is a matter of responding thankfully, by divine grace, to God's initiative.

And, on the other side, men bind themselves to God in this covenant that they will exercise repentance and faith, or that they will receive with a true faith this great benefit which God offers, and render such obedience as will be acceptable to him. This mutual engagement of God and man is confirmed by these outward signs which we call sacraments, which are holy signs, declaring and sealing unto us God's good will, and our thankfulness and obedience.⁸⁶

It is noteworthy that there is an important difference between the text of the 1584 edition of the *Compendium* (Geneva, 1584), edited by Simon Goulart (1543-1628), and the text of the same commentary entitled *Explicationes Catecheseos* and published in Ursinus' *Theologica Opera* (Heidelberg, 1612), edited by Quirinus Reuter (1558-1613).⁸⁷ In the 1612 text the first line of the answer to the question, "What is the covenant?" (*Quid sit foedus?*) was: "The covenant in general is a mutual pact of two parties...." (*Foedus in genere est mutua pactio duarum partium...*), whereas in the 1584 text, the first line of the answer read: "The covenant generally signifies a mutual promise or pact between two parties...." (*Foedus in genere significat mutuam promissionem vel pactionem inter duas partes...*). In fact, the phrase *promissio vel pactio mutua* occurred twice in the 1584 definition but not at all in the 1612 definition. In the Reuter edition, the word *promissio* does not even occur in the answer to the question. Thus, the impact upon the reader of the 1584 Goulart text is, somewhat different from that of the 1612 Reuter text. In the Reuter text, one is struck by the obligations of the covenant while the former text

⁸¹Hinc facile colligitur definitio foederis Dei. Est enim mutua pactio inter Deum et homines, qua Deus confirmat hominibus, se futurum eis propitum, remissurum peccata, donaturum iustitiam novam, spiritum sanctum, & vitam aeternam, per & propter filium mediatorem.... (*Explicationes, Opera*, 1, 99).

⁸²Question 72: *Quod ergo est Mediatoris officium?* Foedus inter Deum & homines, qui a Deo desecrant, restituere (*Summa, Opera*, 1, 16).

⁸³Question 73: *Cur foedus hoc sine Mediatore sanari non poterat?* Quia iustitia Dei postulabat, ut Deus hominibus propter peccatum esset in aeternum iratus, cum igitur esset impossibile, ut contra suam iustitiam DEUS ullam cum genere humano societatem iniret; necesse fuit aliquem intervenire, qui Deum nobis exorans iustitiae Dei satisfaciens, & omnem in posterum offensionem tollens, homines a Deo avulsos, rursus cum eo coniungeret (*Opera*, 1, 16).

⁸⁴For the same reasons, John Farthing has also identified the theme *propter Christum* as important for interpreting the covenant theology of Girolamo Zanchi. See John Farthing, "Jerome Zanchi on the Covenant," *Calvin Theological Journal* 29 (1994), 152-3.

⁸⁵Question 58: *Quare Iesus dicitur?* Quia merito & efficacia sua, salutis perfectae atque aeternae autor est omnibus in ipsum credentibus (*Summa, Opera*, 1, 15).

⁸⁶...Vicissim homines se obligant Deo ad fidem & poenitentiam, hoc est, ad recipiendum vera fide hoc tantum beneficium, & ad praestandum Deo veram obedientiam. Haec pactio mutua Dei & hominum symbolis externis confirmatur, quae vocamus sacramenta, hoc est, sacra signa testificantia de hac Dei ergo nos voluntate, & nostra erga Deum gratitudine atque officii (*Opera*, 1, 99).

⁸⁷For biographical details on Reuter see Melchior Adam, *Vitae Germanorum Theologorum* (Heidelberg, 1620), 819-27; s.v. Reuter, Quirinus, Freiherr R. Filiencron, ed. *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, 55 vol. (Leipzig, 1875-1910), 28.328-9. For Goulart, see Leonard C. Jones, *Simon Goulart, étude biographique et bibliographique* (Geneva, 1917); J-Fr. Gilmont, "Goulart, Simon," *Dictionnaire d' Histoire et de Geographie Ecclesiastiques*, ed. R. Aubert, 25 vol. (Paris, 1912-), 21.939-46.

seems to balance promise and obligation. It was solely the Goulart text by which the Oxford divines had access to Ursinus' lectures for twenty-five years. Moreover, the definition as found in the Reuter edition is also considerably longer than that found in the Genevan edition of 1584. Clearly the text was rearranged and enlarged by Reuter. On this particular point, one cannot know with certainty which text most closely resembled Ursinus' lectures on the catechism. Still, this textual variant should give pause to the critics of Ursinus' federalism.⁸⁸

One should also remember that Ursinus' definition of the covenant in his lectures occurred in his explication of the *second* section of the Heidelberg Catechism -- which focuses on grace and salvation -- not in the first which focuses on guilt and the convicting character of the Law. He spent nearly four folio columns on Christ as the Mediator of redemption.⁸⁹ Thus, Ursinus was lecturing his students about the role of the Mediator in redeeming his people, not about our role in negotiating *quid pro quo* with God for salvation. This is an essentially Protestant *ordo*. He was emphasizing Christ's priestly-mediatorial office against the Roman sacerdotal system. Prior to the question "What is the covenant of God?" (*Quid sit foedus Dei?*), he linked the doctrine of the covenant explicitly and closely with Christ's office as Mediator under the heading *De foedere*.

It has been shown, that a Mediator is one who reconciles parties that are at variance, as God and men. This reconciliation is called in the Scriptures a Covenant, which has particular reference to the Mediator, inasmuch as every mediator is the mediator of some covenant, and the reconciler of two opposing parties. Hence the doctrine of the Covenant which God made with man, is closely connected with the doctrine of the Mediator.⁹⁰

Informed by the broader context of this definition, one sees that for Ursinus *foedus* is not about two equal parties, but about the work of Christ reconciling sinners to God through his mediatorial work.⁹¹ Richard A. Muller observes that in Ursinus, "Christ is both mediator and *medius*...."⁹² This is made explicit in the second part of the section when Ursinus asked, "How could this covenant between God and man be made?" (*Quomodo foedus inter Deum & homines iniri possit?*)

This covenant could not have been made without a Mediator. For we could neither satisfy nor return to favor with God, nor indeed receive the benefit of redemption [purchased] by another. For, at that time, God would not, on account of his justice, admit us into his favor without sufficient satisfaction. We were enemies of God, and hence access to God shall not stand open to us, except

⁸⁸Zacharias Ursinus, *Opera* 1, 99; cf. idem, *Doctrinae Christianae*, 138: Foedus in genere significat mutua, promissionem vel pactionem duas partes, qua utraque pars alteri se certis conditionibus obligat ad aliquid faciendum, dandum, vel accipiendum, adhibitis ceremoniis & Symbolis ad solemnem testificationem.

⁸⁹Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Durham, N.C., 1986), 96-7, noted that Ursinus' doctrine of the Mediator preceded and governed his covenant theology, indeed the gospel, the doctrine of faith, and his credal exposition.

⁹⁰Ursinus, *Commentary*, 96; Dictum est, quod mediator sit persona reconcilians partes diffidentes, Deum & homines. Ista autem reconciliatio in scripturis dicitur foedus, quod est correlativum mediatoris. Omnis enim mediator est alicuius foederis mediator, & duarum partium conciliator. Quare cum doctrina de mediatore cohaeret doctrina de foedere Dei (*Opera*, 1, 98-9).

⁹¹Mark W. Karlberg, "The Mosaic Covenant and the Concept of Works in Reformed Hermeneutics: A Historical-Critical Analysis with Particular Attention to Early Covenant Eschatology" (Ph.D. Diss. Westminster Theological Seminary, 1980), 92, has noted that "this mutuality, however, was *never* construed in terms of equality."

⁹²Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, 98.

through the interceding of Christ the Mediator....This reconciliation was not possible without the satisfaction and death of the Mediator.⁹³

For Ursinus to think *de foedere gratiae* was to think about the Mediator and his *satisfactio* and *intercessio* on behalf of the people of God. Another way of expressing the relationship between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace is to say that he used the doctrine of the covenant to express the Protestant distinction between law and gospel.

Q.36 What distinguishes law and gospel?

The law contains a covenant of nature begun by God with men in creation, that is, it is a natural sign to men, and it requires of us perfect obedience toward God. It promises eternal life to those keeping it, and threatens eternal punishment to those not keeping it. In fact, the gospel contains a covenant of grace, that is, one known not at all under nature. This covenant declares to us fulfillment of its righteousness in Christ, which the law requires, and our restoration through Christ's Spirit. To those who believe in him, it freely promises eternal life for Christ's sake.⁹⁴

The law contained a *foedus naturale* initiated by God in creation. When Ursinus speaks of "creation" he is speaking of the prelapsarian world. When he speaks of "us" we are considered federally, that is, in our representative Adam. He conceived of the prelapsarian arrangement with sinless Adam as a probationary matter. Failure results in judgment. Obedience results in life. The gospel, i.e., covenant of grace, does not have those marks because the terms of the covenant of works were satisfied by Christ.⁹⁵

The critics also fail to account for Ursinus' entire definition of the covenant, or they focus only on the first line of his answer. The words *mutua pactio* must be understood in light of the words *propter Christum*. Ursinus worked out his covenant theology in the context of two catechisms, the *Summa Theologiae (Catechesis Maior)* and his *Compendium* of the Heidelberg Catechism. In their nature, catechisms are cumulative. Thus the only proper place to begin in interpreting catechisms is with the first question. In the interpretation of Ursinus' covenant theology this pedagogical principle has been forgotten. Nor does it appear to be the case that Ursinus was schizophrenic, i.e., Protestant in his formal doctrine of justification and substantially sub-Protestant in his doctrine of sanctification. According to Question 86 of the Heidelberg Catechism we are redeemed "for the sake of Christ without any merit of ours" (*propter Christum sine ullo nostro merito*). For Ursinus, salvation is always *sola gratia* and *sola fide*.⁹⁶ Question 1 of the *Summa* asked,

What firm comfort do you have in life and in death?

That I was created by God in his image and for eternal life. After I, of my own accord, lost this image in Adam, God out of his immense and gracious mercy, received me into his covenant of grace, so that, on the basis of the obedience and

⁹³Hoc foedus non potuit fieri sine mediatore. Nam neque nos satisfacere poteramus: neque redire in gratiam cum Deo, imo nec accipere beneficium reconciliationis ab alio partum. Tum etiam Deus propter iustitiam suam noluit nos absque satisfactione sufficiente admittere. Eramus hostes Dei: ideo aditus ad Deum nobis non patebat, nisi intercedente pro nobis Christo mediatore....Non potuit reconciliatio haec fieri sine satisfactione & morte mediatoris (*Opera*, 1, 99).

⁹⁴Question 36: *Quod est discrimen legis et evangelii?* Lex continet foedus naturale, in creatione a Deo cum hominibus initium, hoc est, natura hominibus nota est; & requirit a nobis perfectam obedientiam erga Deum, praestantibus eam promittit vitam aeternam, non praestantibus minatur aeternas poenas. Evangelium vero continet foedus gratiae, hoc est, minime natura notum existens: ostendit nobis eius iustitiam, quam Lex requirit, impletionem in Christo, & restitutionem in nobis per Christi Spiritum; & promittit vitam aeternam gratis propter Christum, his qui in eum credunt (*Opera*, 1, 14).

⁹⁵Question 32: *Quare hoc foedus etiam testamentum dicitur?* Primo; quia in Ecclesia usurpari coepit nomen testamenti pro foedere. Secundo; quia sicut testamentum non est ratum, nisi interveniente morte testatoris: ita foedus hoc sanciri non potuit nisi morte Christi (*Opera*, 1, 14).

⁹⁶See *Heidelberg Catechism*, Question 87.

death of his Son, who was sent in the flesh, he gave to me, a believer, righteousness and eternal life. Moreover, He sealed his covenant in my heart through his Spirit who renews me in God's image and who cries in me "Abba, Father," and through his Word and the visible signs of his covenant.⁹⁷

Clearly this answer, like the first answer of the Heidelberg Catechism, to which the *Summa* is organically connected, did not begin with conditions of entrance into the covenant, but with God and man as the image of God. The ground of confidence is God's "immense and gracious mercy." The object of faith is the obedience of the incarnate Son. The bond of one's union with Christ is God's Spirit, who is the power of sanctification. Building on this divine monergism, Question 2 asked, "How do you know that this sort of covenant was begun by God with you?" The answer: "Because I am truly a Christian."⁹⁸ By *christianus* he plainly means "elect," as is made clear in the following question: "Whom do you call truly Christian? Those who by faith are truly engrafted into Christ and baptized into him."⁹⁹ Note that he carefully expressed this most Calvinist idea of union with Christ in the passive voice. Questions 4 and 5 function as a unit to seal Ursinus' commitment to a thoroughly Augustinian view of salvation. Question 4 argued for the uniqueness of Christianity among world religions. "*Is therefore none but the Christian religion true?* None."¹⁰⁰ Question 5 continued, "*Why do you assert this?* Because to this religion only the Holy Spirit bears witness in believing hearts. This religion alone declares sure liberation from sin and death."¹⁰¹ The federal structure of Ursinus' understanding of fall and redemption does not result in a higher estimation of human ability, but repeatedly sends one back to Christ. When he asks, "Who can offer this obedience?," the answer is "Christ alone." It is not and never has been possible to go to anyone else for the obedience necessary for redemption.¹⁰² If one's position before God was measured by his status as image-bearer before the fall, *post lapsum* it is measured by its relative absence.¹⁰³

When Ursinus' definition of the covenant has Christ as the Second Adam in view, it is controlled by the probationary prelapsarian covenant. The covenant as it has the sinner in view, however, is purely gracious. "From where therefore do you conceive the hope of eternal life? From the covenant of grace, which God initiated afresh with believers in Christ."¹⁰⁴ *What is this covenant?*

It is reconciliation with God, having been secured by the intercession of Christ, in which God promises believers, always to be a Father near to them for the sake of Christ and to give them eternal life; and they themselves promise in turn that they will accept these benefits by true faith in him, and as becomes grateful and

⁹⁷*Quam habes firmam in vita & morte consolationem?* Quod a Deo ad imaginem eius & vitam aeternam sum conditus: & postquam hanc volens in Adamo amiseram, Deus ex immensa & gratuita misericordia me recepit in foedus gratiae suae, ut propter obedientiam & mortem Filii sui missi in carnem, donet mihi credenti iustitiam & vitam aeternam: atque hoc foedus suum in corde meo per Spiritum suum, ad imaginem Dei me reformantem & clamantem in me Abba Pater, & per verbum suum & signa huius foederis visibilia obsignavit (*Summa, Opera*, 1, 10).

⁹⁸Question 2: *Qui scis tale foedus a Deo tecum esse initum?* Quia vere Christianus sum (*Opera*, 1, 10). We are not saved because we are sanctified but sanctified because we are saved.

⁹⁹Question 3: *Quem dicis vere Christianum?* Qui vere fide Christo insitus, & in eum baptizatus est (*Opera*, 1, 10).

¹⁰⁰Question 4: *Nulla ne igitur nisi Christiana religio est vera?* Nulla (*Opera*, 1, 10).

¹⁰¹Question 5: *Qua ratione hoc aseveras?* Quia huic soli Spiritus sanctus in credentium cordibus testimonium perhibet: Haec sola liberationem certam a peccato & morte ostendit (*Opera*, 1, 10).

¹⁰²Question 18: *Potestne quisquam nostrum hanc obedientiam praestare?* Solo Christo excepto, nullus unquam hominum in hac vita eam praestare neque potuit, neque poterit (*Opera*, 1, 11).

¹⁰³Question 19: *Cur autem praestare non possumus?* Quia imaginem Dei amisimus (*Opera*, 1, 11).

¹⁰⁴Question 30: *Unde igitur spem vitae aeternae concipis?* Ex foedere gratuito, quod DEUS denuo cum credentib. in Christum init (*Opera*, 1, 11).

obedient sons, worship God for ever, and under both visible signs (which we call sacraments) publicly attest this mutual promise.¹⁰⁵

The covenant of grace, as respects fallen sinners, is a distinct species of covenant. Elect sinners are viewed as those for whom the terms of the covenant have been met in their federal head, Christ. Thus, for Ursinus, gospel and *foedus* are synonymous in Christ. "What does the gospel teach?"

What God promises to us in his gracious covenant: how in this covenant we might be received, and how we might know ourselves to be in this covenant, that is, how we might be delivered from sin and death, and how we might be sure of this liberation.¹⁰⁶

In his *ordo salutis* Ursinus left no room for human initiative, not even in the exercise of faith. By nature "we were enemies of God" (*eramus hostes Dei*), unwilling and unable to accept the benefits of redemption so graciously purchased. Thus any interpretation of Ursinus' *de conditionibus* must be interpreted in the light of his thoroughgoing Calvinism.

There is but one covenant, because the principal conditions, which are called the substance of the covenant, are the same before and since the incarnation of Christ; for in each testament God promises to those that repent and believe, the remission of sin; whilst men bind themselves, on the other hand, to exercise faith in God, and to repent of their sin.¹⁰⁷

The "conditions" of which Ursinus wrote should be made clear. If, by conditions, he meant law-keeping, then he was teaching a sort of conditionality strange to the Reformation. This, however, was not the case. He defended the unity of the substance of the covenant (*substantia foederis*), distinguishing between *substantia* and *circumstantias*. The *conditiones* are equated with the *substantia*, i.e., the promise of the remission of sins (*remissionem peccatorum*) of those who believe, who are those who have been regenerated by sovereign grace. It was in this context that he raised the question of human responsibility to the call of the gospel. The offer of the gospel to all is sincere since "none were made participants until they embrace and keep that covenant, that is, who by true faith receive Christ and his benefits for themselves."¹⁰⁸ The divine monergism extends to the preservation of the redeemed. He defined God's kingdom in terms of the Son's preservation of the elect through the ministry of the gospel, against the devil, *in conspectum Patris*.¹⁰⁹

For Ursinus, good works are an "internal and external cooperation with the precepts in the Decalogue."¹¹⁰ This definition might be Gabriel Biel's, except that unlike Biel, Ursinus is *not* writing *de merito congruo*. Rather, he is affirming the place of the law in the life of the believer *after renewal*. The purpose of the law is that the elect

¹⁰⁵Question 31: *Quod est illud foedus?* Est reconciliatio cum Deo, Christi intercessione impetrata, in qua Deus promittit, se credentibus, propter Christum perpetuo fore Patrem propitium, ac daturum vitam aeternam et ipsi vicissim spondent, se haec beneficia vera fide accepturos, & sicut gratos & obedientes filios decet, perpetuo celebratos: & utrique hanc promissionem mutuum signis visibilibus, quae sacramenta vocamus, publice contestantur (*Opera*, 1, 11).

¹⁰⁶Question 35: *Quid docet evangelium?* Quid promittat nobis Deus in fodere gratiae suae: quomodo in illud recipiamur; & in eo nos esse sciamus, hoc est, quomodo a peccato & morte liberemus, & huius liberatinis certi simus (*Opera*, 1, 14).

¹⁰⁷*Commentary*, 99; cf. *The Summe*, 256. Unum dumtaxat est, quia conditiones principales, quae substantia foederis dicuntur, eadem sunt ante Christum & post Christum exhibitum. Deus credentibus & poenitentiam agentibus promittit remissionem peccatorum & homines se obligant ad credendum Deo, & ad poenitentiam agendam (*Opera*, 1,100).

¹⁰⁸Question 37: *Nunquid Evangelium docet, foedus gratia Dei ad omnes homines pertinere?* Omnes quidem ad illud vocat: sed nulli eius fiunt participes, nisi qui illud amplectuntur & servant, hoc est, qui vera fide oblatum sibi Christum & beneficia eius accipiunt (*Opera*, 1, 14).

¹⁰⁹*Summa, Opera*, 1.15-6.

¹¹⁰*Summa, Opera*, 1, 21.

...[first] may know the worship which God approves and requires from his confederates [i.e., those in covenant with him]. Next, seeing how far they are from the perfect fulfillment of the law in this life, that they might be kept in humility and aspire to heavenly life.¹¹¹

Ursinus moved to good works *only after* establishing Christ as the federal head of the redeemed and the gracious nature of the covenant by which the elect are saved. The "covenant of God's grace" was said to "obligate" believers to manifest "fruit of faith," i.e., "true conversion to God."¹¹² Conversion is "mortification of the flesh" and "vivification of the spirit,"¹¹³ or regeneration. Regeneration is the renewal of the divine image lost in the fall. "*What is the quickening of the Spirit?* It is joy in God who is reconciled to us through Christ, and love and ardent zeal for righteousness for the sake of God's glory."¹¹⁴

Conclusion

Undoubtedly many streams of thought and practice converged at the Assembly of divines at Westminster. One significant stream was the Protestant, gracious and holy federalism of Zacharias Ursinus, mediated to the divines in part through the Oxford Calvinists. Having surveyed Ursinus on the questions of conditionality in the covenant, and on the covenant of works one finds him to teach that in the beginning, God instituted a covenant of works. Since it was a creational arrangement with humanity in its original state, it was a *foedus naturale*. The prelapsarian covenant was not only natural but probationary and made with Adam as the federal head of the entire human race. In Ursinus' view, Adam was created fully capable of meeting the conditions of the covenant and of entering into eternal blessedness with God. With respect to conditionality in Ursinus' view of the covenant, he distinguished between the probationary prelapsarian covenant of works and the covenant of grace instituted after the fall. In his double covenant scheme, the only conditions which adhere to the covenant are those obligations which the believer takes upon himself subsequent to election, faith and renewal. It is the Holy Spirit who, together with the Word and sacraments, meets these conditions in the believer.¹¹⁵

There is no evidence that Ursinus renewed the medieval *pactum* theology or taught a covenant theology which imposed conditions on sinful human beings prior to entrance into the covenant, which they must meet on their own or even with the assistance of grace, *merito de congruo*. We have argued that, rather, his doctrine of the covenant should be interpreted in the broader context of both the Heidelberg Catechism, of which he was a major author in the light of his *Compendium* and of the *Summa*. In short, Ursinus' doctrine of justification and of the covenant is profoundly Protestant. It is: Christ for me (*Christus pro me*).¹¹⁶

¹¹¹Question 150: *Cur autem post evangelium praedicatum, conversis etiam proponenda est?* Primum, ut discant, quos cultus probet DEUS & a confoederatis suis requirat. Deinde ut videntes quam procul in hac vita absint a perfecta legis impletione, in humilitate contineantur, & ad vitam coelestem aspirent (*Summa, Opera*, 1, 21).

¹¹²Question 142: *Quis est ergo fructus fidei, ad quem foedus gratiae Dei nos obligat, & ex quo vera fides agnoscitur?* Vera ad Deum conversio (*Summa, Opera* 1, 21).

¹¹³Question 143: *Quid est conversio ad Deum?* Mortificatio carnis & vivificatio spiritus (*Summa, Opera* 1, 21). In this section, as well as in the others, it is clear that there is little difference between Ursinus' view of the importance of sanctification and that of the mainstream of Puritanism.

¹¹⁴Question 145: *Quid est vivificatio Spiritus?* Est laetitia in Deo per Christum in nobis propitio, & amor ac studium ardens iustitiae propter gloriam Dei (*Opera* 1, 21).

¹¹⁵Contra Robert Kolb, "Luther, Augsburg, And the Concept of Authority in the Late Reformation Ursinus vs. The Lutherans," *Controversy and Conciliation: The Palatinate Reformation, 1559-1618*, ed. Derk Visser (Pittsburgh, 1986).

¹¹⁶*Opera*, 1, 230.